

The role of plurilingual parenting in parental engagement of immigrant families

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The role of plurilingual parenting in parental engagement of immigrant families

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ABSTRACT

Due to the increased mobility and linguistic and cultural diversity internationally, there has been a renewed interest in the linguistic practices of immigrant families. Earlier scholarship focused on the difference between parenting in monolingual contexts and bilingual parenting conceptualised as management of more than one language in a family. To better understand the complexity of language practices in immigrant families, this article develops a new concept of plurilingual parenting. This analysis is based on empirical data from Canada and uses plurilingualism as a theoretical framework. I found that immigrant parents adopt plurilingual parenting, which is characterised by the following features: (1) parental beliefs in the dynamic and fluid nature of language practices; (2) family language policies that are flexible and allow for partial proficiency in languages in familial linguistic repertoires; and (3) interconnectedness of language and culture. Implications include the possibility to use the concept of plurilingual parenting in the scholarship related to family language policy and identity negotiation in immigrant families. Educators working with immigrant students will benefit from the familiarity with the concept of plurilingual parenting by aligning their expectations with parental practices and appreciating students' funds of knowledge.

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Plurilingualism; parental engagement; parenting; immigration

Introduction

Linguistically diverse families have attracted the interest of educational researchers for several decades (Canagarajah 2007; Cummins and Swain 1986; Garcia, Lin, and May 2017). The focus has often been on the academic achievement of multilingual students (Bialystok 2016; Mady 2017), heritage language maintenance (Ortega 2019; Trifonas and Aravossitas 2018), and cognitive advantages of bilingualism (Antoniou 2019; Bialystok, Craik, and Luk 2012). In the context of increased migration in superdiverse societies (UNESCO 2018; Vertovec 2007), the linguistic practices of immigrant families become more visible in the official discourse, where linguistic diversity is seen as either a threat to national unity (Kalan 2016), a resource to enhance human capital (Holborow 2018) or an opportunity to develop global citizenship (Coste and Simon 2009) and creativity (Piccardo 2017). As families are expected to become ever more actively engaged in their children's education and learning in neoliberal societies (Goodall 2019), this expectation also reaches the domain of family language policy and the development of children's linguistic resources (Piller

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and Gerber 2021). Due to the growing popularity of bilingual programmes (Cummins 2009), parents are instrumental in choosing the language of instruction, providing sufficient literacy resources, and often paying for extra tuition in additional languages (Ee 2016). Immigrant parents have to make additional decisions related to the maintenance of heritage languages alongside the development of dominant languages both at home and in schools (Juan-Garau 2014).

In the context of increased mobility and linguistic diversity, the old notions of monolingual versus bilingual parenting (King and Fogle 2013) are no longer adequate to understand the complexity of language practices of immigrant families. They switch between multiple languages on a daily basis (Pavlenko 2004), often have adults of mixed linguistic background (Guardado 2008), and seamlessly use different languages for different purposes (Moore and Gajo 2009). This study proposes to look at language practices in immigrant families from the plurilingual perspective and provides new evidence from Canada to highlight the role of plurilingual parenting in parental engagement among immigrant families. It is guided by the following research question: How do parental language beliefs and reported practices in immigrant families characterise their parenting as plurilingual?

The article continues with the description of plurilingualism¹ as a theoretical framework that is the most appropriate to make sense of language practices in immigrant families. Then, I provide the review of the literature on the role of parents in fostering plurilingual repertoires of school age children as a component of parental engagement followed by the description of complex and fluid language practices in immigrant families from the plurilingual perspective. The urgent need to develop **plurilingual parenting** as a new concept is laid out before moving to the empirical parts of the article with its methodology, findings, and discussion sections.

What do plurilingualism and plurilingual mean?

In the context of this article, plurilingualism is understood both as the linguistic plurality present in individuals and the way they use languages, and a theoretical framework that is applied for the analysis of linguistic practices (Piccardo 2018). Plurilingualism as a concept has first emerged alongside the introduction of plurilingual and pluricultural competence in the draft of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe (CoE) 1996), which was published as a book in 2001 (CoE 2001) and supported by its companion volume (CoE 2020). Key elements of plurilingualism are represented by (1) the dynamic view of language practices (Piccardo 2017), (2) partial proficiency in languages and language varieties (Piccardo and North 2020), (3) emphasis on the use of languages in multiple contexts rather than on the ideal proficiency of a 'native speaker' (CoE 2001), (4) the idea of linguistic repertoire of individuals (Marshall and Moore 2018), and (5) interconnectedness of language and culture in a fluid and complex system (CoE 2001). Moreover, plurilingualism led to the development of plurilingual teaching methodologies (Chen et al. 2022; Lau and Van Viegen 2020; Piccardo et al. 2022b), which value all languages and cultures in students' repertoires, support minoritised languages, and enhance students' and teachers' agency (Piccardo and North 2019).

Within plurilingualism as a theoretical framework a distinction is made between multilingualism as coexistence of multiple languages in a given society, and plurilingualism understood as the complex use of two or more languages by individuals (Marshall and Moore 2018). While the linguistic practices in diverse societies have always been plurilingual, the understanding of this complexity on the level of individual repertoires has emerged only in the last several decades (Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford, and Lawrence 2022a).

In the field of language education, the term 'plurilingual' has been used to describe pedagogical approaches (e.g. Task-based Language Teaching (van den Branden 2006), Action-oriented Approach (Piccardo and North 2019), teaching tools and techniques (e.g. portfolios, tasks, scenarios) (Antony-Newman et al. 2022), and linguistic practices (e.g. translanguaging², intercomprehension³) (Doye 2005; Li 2018). In this article, I use plurilingualism as a theoretical framework to make sense of complex and fluid linguistic practices in immigrant families.

Plurilingual parenting as the form of parental engagement

Parental engagement

Parental engagement in children's learning has long been acknowledged as one of the major factors that shape students' educational experiences, academic achievement, and well-being (Goodall 2017; Jeynes 2011; Warikoo et al. 2020). Parental engagement encompasses a range of practices related to children's learning that are rooted in the home and the family, including parenting and learning at home (Goodall and Montgomery 2014). Although both teachers and parents are interested in students' learning, they tend to view the role of parents from different perspectives (Myers 2015). While teachers focus on parental involvement in school-based activities (classroom volunteering, fundraising, parent-teacher conferences, and school councils), parents feel more comfortable being engaged in the home and community domains (parenting, learning at home and academic socialisation, extracurriculars and community involvement).

Although in-school activities are privileged over home practices at the policy level (Antony-Newman 2019a), it is academic socialisation provided by parents in the family (parents' beliefs, expectations, and actions related to their children's education) that improves academic achievement the most (Yamamoto and Sonnenschein 2016). Immigrant families are the fastest-growing (UNESCO 2018) but represent an under-served group of parents, who often experience specific barriers to their involvement, namely the low familiarity with host countries' education system and language barrier (Antony-Newman 2019b). Moreover, different beliefs regarding the nature of school curriculum and pedagogy among immigrant parents and host-country teachers is another possible disjuncture (for details see Antony-Newman 2020).

Some of the key questions that immigrant parents face in the host country are related to language and identity: what language(s) their children should keep and learn (Little 2020); what family language policy should be (Slavkov 2016); what language of instruction is the best for their children (Ee 2016).

Language practices in immigrant families from the plurilingual perspective

As mentioned earlier, plurilingualism represents a strong analytical framework for the nuanced analysis of complex and fluid language practices in immigrant families due to its emphasis on all languages in repertoires regardless of proficiency levels (Galante 2018) and the idea of composite language proficiency (CoE 2001). But, what do we already know about the language practices in linguistically diverse immigrant families? The existing literature has a focus on the following main themes: choice of language of instruction (Slavkov 2016), heritage language(s) maintenance and loss (Little 2020), complex family language policy (Lanza and Lexander 2019), and the support of literacy activities in multiple languages (Song 2016a).

When children start formal education, parents shape their plurilingual practices by choosing the language of instruction, where such an option is available to them. Bilingual and immersion programmes, which were originally created to help monolingual speakers of a dominant language master another language (Cummins 2009), are now increasingly popular among linguistically and culturally diverse families and plurilingual immigrant parents in particular (Mady 2007). They offer immigrant families an opportunity to develop their children's plurilingual repertoires by adding one or more additional languages to those already in their repertoires (Lanza 2021). Parents report multiple reasons for choosing bilingual programmes ranging from the development of bilingual abilities (Schwartz et al. 2010) to the validation of all languages and cultures in the classroom (Ee 2016).

The question of maintaining the heritage languages in immigrant communities has always presented families with the dilemma to keep the language(s) of the home country or to assimilate into the linguistic and cultural milieu of the host nation (Liang 2018). Immigrant families have very heterogeneous linguistic arrangements ranging from both partners sharing a linguistic minority

background (Liang and Shin 2021) to situations when one parent identifies mostly with the majority language of the host country, while the other speaks a language of the home country (Torsh 2020). Subsequently, the process of heritage language maintenance plays out differently in distinctive linguistic arrangements. For example, Nesteruk (2010) analysed the heritage language maintenance and loss among highly-educated immigrants from seven Eastern European nations (Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Poland, Belarus, and Bosnia) in the US. In this case, both family members came from Eastern European countries, so their plurilingual repertoires included one or more languages from this region and English. Interviewed parents mentioned that they value heritage language(s) as components of family culture and traditions, a tool for intergenerational communication, and a prerequisite for developing bilingualism (Nesteruk 2010). Parents adopted a range of strategies to maintain the family heritage language by speaking the first language (L1) at home, reading books in L1 with children, accessing ethnic community resources, hosting grandparents in the US and visiting home countries in Eastern Europe. Supporting L1 in immigrant families fostered the plurilingual repertoires of children due to the power of English in childcare centres and schools, whereas parents fluidly moved between English at work and heritage language at home (Nesteruk 2010).

On the other hand, Sims, Ellis, and Knox (2016) focused on even more linguistically diverse families in regional Australia, where one parent often has English as their L1, while the other parent is a native speaker of a heritage language, but both parents have two to four languages in their linguistic repertoires. Located in the monolingual context, where English is the dominant language, plurilingual parents managed to mobilise their plurilingual capital to ensure their children are growing up with several languages in their repertoires. Authors introduced the concept of the parental language portfolio understood as ‘resources in parental linguistic repertoire (which) are available to be directed to a particular purpose’ (Sims, Ellis, and Knox 2016, 778) and include parental experiences, parental values, and intrafamilial support. They found that parents who had plurilingual experiences themselves have more strategies to offer such experiences to their children (Sims, Ellis, and Knox 2016). Additionally, grandparents play an important role in supporting plurilingual development by speaking minority languages with children (Sims, Ellis, and Knox 2016).

In the home domain, immigrant families often adopt the family language policy (FLP) (Spolsky 2012) that is more flexible and takes into account the emergent practices of plurilingual children. If the early studies in the field of family language policy (Curdt-Christiansen 2018; King 2016; Spolsky 2012) mostly highlighted the established types of language management and practices (e.g. one-parent – one-language [OPOL], L1-only at home), recent studies reveal more plurilingual and fluid practices at home. For example, Kostoulas and Motsiou (2020) in the Greek context found that many parents embrace the code-switching⁴ as a natural element of linguistic behaviour and often relax the OPOL policy over time moving towards the two-parents – two-languages approach, where both parents speak both languages depending on the situation. In the study of German immigrant families living in Norway, Purkarthofer (2021) introduced the concept of ‘partially shared repertoires’, where family members are comfortable with German, English and Norwegian serving as ‘languages of encounter’ (739). In their case, German is the main home language, but Norwegian is becoming more important for children due to their integration into the school system, whereas parents often rely on English in their professional life.

One of the most linguistically challenging areas for immigrant families is the support of literacy activities in multiple languages. They have to overcome such challenges as lack of resources in heritage languages (Ahojja et al. 2022) and the dominance of the majority language, especially in the school domain. Nevertheless, immigrant families are investing significant time and money to make sure their children can read and write in their heritage language by buying books and sending children for supplementary instruction in their heritage language (Karpava 2021). High expectations towards developing literacy skills both in heritage language and majority language require parents to provide children with necessary resources, which is easier for immigrants from large and established communities. In the study of Korean immigrant families in the US, Song (2016b) found that

due to parental support, children successfully used both Korean and English for a range of literacy activities and meaning-making across texts in different modalities (books, TV shows, pictures). They used two languages as resources and engaged in complex translanguaging practices including translation and trans-enunciation (Song 2016b).

Beyond bilingual parenting

In the neoliberal climate, parents are responsible for their children's education as never before (Vincent 2017). They are expected not only to get involved in schools and help with homework (Patall, Cooper, and Robinson 2008), but also manage their children's time use, arrange extra-curricular activities, invest time and money in tutoring, and foster high aspirations (Goodall and Montgomery 2014). Intensive parenting, especially mothering (Hays 1996), adds language planning to the ever-increasing list of parental anxieties about their children's social and academic success (Piller and Gerber 2021).

Many linguistically diverse families decide to adopt *bilingual parenting*. It refers to the parental language practices aimed at fostering the development of two or more languages among children in the family (Piller and Gerber 2021). In this context, bilingualism is often seen as 'double monolingualism' (Heller 2007), where the parental goal is to make sure that their children acquire native-like proficiency in two languages along the four discrete skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) (Wilson 2020). Effective bilingual practices are difficult to achieve in this context due to a combination of parental beliefs and practices. Parents are often afraid that the majority language (e.g. English) will not be developed enough, consecutive bilingualism is seen as problematic, and oOPOL approach is viewed as a necessary requirement despite the difficulty of its implementation (Piller and Gerber 2021).

Against the background of increased linguistic diversity and new empirical evidence of complex and fluid linguistic practices, parental beliefs about bilingual parenting have been considerably challenged (Mazzaferro 2018). Informed by the plurilingualism as a theoretical framework, in this paper I propose to use the term **plurilingual parenting** as a concept that is informed by parental beliefs about the dynamic nature of language practices, flexible family language policies towards their familial linguistic repertoires, and interconnectedness of language and culture for the negotiation of identities in immigrant families.

Methodology

To better understand the plurilingual practices in immigrant families and the characteristics of plurilingual parenting, I used data from a larger project on immigrant parental engagement. I interviewed 19 immigrant parents (15 mothers and four fathers) who moved to Canada from nine Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania, Russia and Ukraine) and whose children attended elementary schools in Ontario at the time of the interview. Participants were recruited through my personal network with the combination of purposeful and snowballing sampling (Parker, Scott, and Geddes 2019). As an Eastern European immigrant parent of three school-aged children, I could relate to and provide better insight into the parental engagement and language practices of participants in this study, which required significant reflexivity on my behalf (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Participants and I share similar educational experiences in the post-socialist context and following migration from Eastern Europe to Canada. I grew up in the diglossic context in Ukraine with Russian and Ukrainian languages in my repertoire, which was further enriched by English, German, and French as foreign languages. After moving to Canada, I had to ensure that my children would keep our heritage languages, while living in the English-speaking environment with a significant presence of French at school. My personal history played an important role in inspiring and developing this project. All interviewed parents grew up and were educated in their home countries. Similar to

the majority of immigrants to Canada, participants in this study moved to their new country as skilled migrants (IRCC 2019) and had to meet demanding requirements related to education, work experience, and language skills in English and/or French. All interviewed mothers have an undergraduate degree or higher, whereas some fathers did not complete any post-secondary education and were in working-class occupations after their immigration to Canada. Key demographic characteristics of interviewed parents are provided in Table 1.

Semi-structured interviews lasted on average from 45 minutes to an hour and included questions related to participants parenting strategies, types of parental involvement in schooling and parental engagement in learning, family language policy and linguistic practices at home, literacy activities that involved children in their families, choice of bilingual education programmes, and heritage language learning. Some of the key questions were the following: *What language(s) do you speak at home? Is keeping L1 important for your family? Why did you decide to send your child to French Immersion classes? Do your children read in their L1?* I transcribed the interviews and applied content analysis. First level coding was rooted in the combination of pre-set codes from the literature on immigrant language practices and plurilingualism and emergent codes from the data. Second level codes resulted in the refinement and reorganisation of first level codes into a smaller number of categories (e.g. heritage language maintenance, partial proficiency, plurilingual practices, family language policy). At the stage of third level coding categories were further refined to develop themes, which in turn were used to answer the research question of the study (Saldaña 2009). For example, when analysing language practices in immigrant families, descriptive codes *preference for reading in English, slow French development, difficulty reading in L1* (first level coding) were refined into a category 'partial proficiency' (second level coding). At the third stage, the category of 'partial proficiency' was combined with another category 'fluid language use' to develop a theme 'plurilingual practices' (third level coding).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of interviewed parents.

Name and age	Country of origin	Highest level of education	Current job	Years of living in Canada	Children
Andrea (48)	Serbia	Bachelor's	Manager (advertising)	24	F(24), M(16), M(11)
Eva (44)	Bulgaria	Bachelor's	Costume designer	23	F(12)
Ioana (40)	Romania	Bachelor's	Homemaker	9	M(7), F(1)
Karina (39)	Romania	Bachelor's	Researcher	15	M(10), M(5)
Leo (57) and Jarmila (47)	Czech Republic	Bachelor's college	Engineer Homemaker	24 19	F(17), F(15), F(15), M(12), M(9), F(6)
Maria (39)	Russia	Master's	Self-employed	15	M(13), M(10), F(5)
Marina (42)	Romania	PhD	University lecturer	15	M(10), M(6)
Nevena (50)	Bulgaria	Bachelor's	Manager (accounting)	17	F(24), M(13)
Oleksandr (37) and Irina (37)	Ukraine	Bachelor's Bachelor's	Educational Administrator educational assistant	3	M(11)
Petra (38)	Hungary	Bachelor's	homemaker	12	F(9), M(6)
Roman (40) and Kira (38)	Ukraine	Bachelor's Bachelor's	Software developer Homemaker	7	F(10), F(5)
Terezia (44)	Slovakia	Bachelor's	childcare worker	15	F(13), F(10), M(8)
Tina (38)	North Macedonia	Master's	graduate student	5	F(6)
Viktor (40)	Serbia	college	massage therapist	22	F(12), M(10)
Yana (40) and Stephan (49)	Ukraine	Master's Bachelor's	ESL instructor Software developer	12	F(18), M(13), F(2)

Findings

How do parental language beliefs and practices in immigrant families characterise their parenting as plurilingual?

Parental beliefs and practices regarding their dynamic and fluid language use

Immigrant parents interviewed for this study expressed beliefs in the dynamic nature of language practices, where different languages are used in a variety of contexts for a range of communicative purposes (CoE 2007). Such beliefs were further reinforced by their own linguistic experiences before immigration. Prior research showed that parents who had enjoyed plurilingual experiences themselves were more eager to foster such experiences for their own children (Sims, Ellis, and Knox 2016). Almost half of the participants in this study come from countries, where several languages are used (Ukraine, countries of the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia). Moreover, many parents studied several foreign languages in school and university, which further enhanced their own plurilingual repertoires:

I didn't speak English when I came, very little. I learned French in school, I learned Latin, we had several languages in Yugoslavia that we had to learn. (Victor)

Subsequently, parents acknowledge the linguistic reality with the fluid and dynamic use of languages in the family:

My husband is Hungarian, so we only speak Hungarian [at home] and I think it's important, otherwise you will not learn the language and, but I do read in English, because I think their grammar has to come up, like they have to catch up with their peers, I mean, those who either have like English-speaking parents or are in the English school, so we have many, many books. And my daughter, who is in Grade 4, can read and write in Hungarian, French, and English. (Petra)

Immigrant parents not only brought their home languages to English-speaking Canada, but further enriched the plurilingual linguistic repertoires⁵ of their children by sending children to French Immersion classes. There were multiple reasons why almost half of interviewed parents decided to choose this bilingual education programme for their children, including convenience, recommendations from community members, and prestige of the programme (Masson, Antony-Newman, and Antony-Newman 2022), but the main rationale behind such decision was belief in the value of language learning:

I value languages, I am the one person, who, you know, who studied languages ... so to me speaking another language is extremely valuable and it was without any question that the children would have to speak more than just English. (Marina)

It's also good for them, both of them, to know Bulgarian and English, I think it gives them a broader perspective. (Nevena)

At the same time, parents acknowledge the partial proficiency in French tied to the complexities of being a minority language speaker attending French Immersion in the English-dominant context (Mady 2017):

Right now my son is in Grade 5 and it was, it's been said from the beginning that that's the way to be ... he is not as good in French as I would have imagined him to be, not as good in English as he would have been if he was in English system, so that worries me a bit, but I've been talking to parents who had kids all the way. (Karina)

Embracing partial proficiency is one of the key tenets of plurilingualism (Piccardo and North 2020) in direct contrast with the bilingual approach (Piller and Gerber 2021). Parents support a range of literacy activities for their children being fully aware that 'native speaker ideal'

(Waddington 2022) for all languages in a repertoire is unlikely to work in culturally and linguistically diverse societies like Canada:

They prefer English. They read French because they have to. They wouldn't read Slovak. We have like kid Slovak books. When they were smaller, they were read to, but they never kind of started to read ... but I am texting to my oldest. She texts me back in Slovak. It's a funny spelling. (Terezia)

Data from immigrant parents interviewed for this study supports the plurilingual reality of family communication rather than language separation (Palmer et al. 2014). Building on their beliefs, parents employ a range of plurilingual practices, for example mediation (Liddicoat, 2014), metalinguistic awareness (Dressler et al. 2011), and translation (Piccardo et al. 2021):

I started to learn French ... I couldn't continue ... , but because I speak, like, I still remember some German, and German and English, Hungarian, you can kind of figure out, and you have to Google translate, which is amazing. It's funny how if they don't understand something they would translate it into either English or Hungarian. (Petra)

To help her daughter with learning French, Petra uses both metalinguistic awareness by leveraging English and Hungarian in their repertoires and translation strategies. In the following example, Terezia also employs translation. Alongside that, she uses L1 (Slovak) to mediate her mathematical knowledge to her daughter:

... she needs help with math, but because I didn't know how to read French at all, I don't know math in English. Whenever she needed help, I let her translate it or show me and then I'll explain it in Slovak, but not in other languages. (Terezia)

Immigrant parents have their own rich experiences of plurilingualism starting from growing up in multilingual societies and/or learning foreign languages other than English before moving to Canada. After migration, they help children navigate their plurilingual environment where L1, English, and sometimes French are often used in a fluid and dynamic nature.

Flexible family language policy: partial proficiency and familial linguistic repertoires

Immigration almost always involves changes in linguistic practices of families and adds another layer to the linguistic diversity in the home domain (Gogolin 2002). As a result, all immigrant parents have to make choices about languages they are going to use and adopt a particular FLP (Curdt-Christiansen 2018). All immigrant parents interviewed for this study expressed at the time of the interview that their FLP was flexible either by design or by necessity. The first group of parents is represented by those who did not have an explicit FLP from the very outset and allowed language use to evolve and change naturally in the family:

No, no, we didn't have any policy like that, but initially we spoke Bulgarian mostly, because my daughter when we came she wasn't really speaking English, and although my husband and I spoke English ... because of our work ... we initially spoke Bulgarian at home, and then it kind of changed, because my daughter started to speak more English. (Nevena)

The second group of parents initially tried to stick to the L1-only policy for home communication (Schwartz 2010) as part of their parenting to foster the bilingual development of children where the heritage language is developed separately from the dominant English in Canadian schools and society at large. Despite such stated attempts, participants in our sample who adopted L1-only policy at home when their children were born, had to make concessions, especially when children started school and moved to a more plurilingual model:

We relaxed in terms of the language, we used to be very strict about only Serbian at home, just because English is so pervasive ... We relaxed a little bit lately, but we still try to speak Serbian at home, and the one thing I found is that when you get into nuances of anything we have to switch to English and that's kind of organic. (Andrea)

We try to speak Macedonian, but she's completely transferred to English. I think all immigrant parents are complaining about this ... We were trying for years just to talk Macedonian ... even if she responded in English, but it's hard. Sometimes your brain just stops working and you answer in English ... I will start answering in English, then I'm like okay, no. I should talk in Macedonian. For me, it's very important that she learns Macedonian, but I can't force it. (Tina)

Interestingly, strict L1-only language policy was often relaxed when parents realised that the heritage language was no longer under threat. As Stepan mentioned: *Now we are a bit relaxed, now we see that they don't have problems with our first language, so we allow them to sometimes speak' [English].*

Family language policy adopted by parents has implications not only for the languages spoken at home, but also shapes literacy activities (King and Fogle 2013). All parents read to their children in L1 and English and made significant commitments in terms of time and effort to ensure children can read in the family's heritage language, which is never easy. Access to print in L1 is always an issue (Cummins 2011), but parents who travel to home countries regularly have an opportunity to buy books. It shows parental dedication and investment to developing L1 literacy:

Like one day a week we have nothing, and in that time I push her, really push, and she has to read for me in Russian for 20 minutes, and write something. (Kira)

No, that's a problem. They don't have unfortunately, even the library here doesn't have a lot of Romanian books. We buy them sometimes in Romania. (Marina)

Parents who decided to send children to French Immersion classes facilitate reading in French by providing access to French books and making sure children read them, which enriches their plurilingual repertoires:

Yes, I read to him and then I make him read to me and we read in English and French. He can't read in Romanian, he finds it very difficult. (Ioana)

They give them reading logs, so each day they have to read ... I could listen and I could look and, you know, when there's a short word and a long word and they say something is short, I say 'This is not right. (Terezia)

As seen from the data, family language policy of immigrant parents interviewed for this study showed a significant level of flexibility mostly shifting from L1-only policy to allow for the use of different languages in different contexts, which makes their FLP plurilingual in nature. By necessity or design parents acknowledged partial linguistic proficiency for their children and allowed their plurilingual linguistic repertoires to evolve without strict language management.

Interconnectedness of language and culture

The interconnectedness of language and culture has always been fundamental for the plurilingual theory developed within the CEFR (CoE 2001). For its proponents, language and culture form a single plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Galante 2020). Language plays an important role in the development of identity and sense of belonging, especially for members of linguistic minorities (Gérin-Lajoie 2016). Immigrant parents interviewed for this project mentioned the importance of language for their culture and plurilingual identity in a variety of ways. Language is one of the markers of national identity in many countries of Central Eastern Europe, which became independent after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires in 1918 (Schöpflin 1996). Keeping L1 is seen by most parents in the study as crucial in preserving some elements of home country culture and fostering the evolving pluralistic identity of their children growing up in Canada:

Yes, for us it is very important, because we don't, even though we live in Canada we would like not to forget where we came from, we don't want to forget our roots. (Ioana)

I think we have to keep it. This is our history, this is our heritage. This will be useful for him in future. (Oleksandr)

Leo, who left former Czechoslovakia in 1980s but is still connected with the community and self-identifies as Czech, expressed pride in the linguistic skills of his children:

We are pretty active in the Czech community. When we compare our kids to other kids in the community. Ours speak Czech the best. Our kids are able to write in Czech. With mistakes, but they are able. The other kids, none of them can write. (Leo)

Language use at home is instrumental for children of immigrants in terms of the development of their own cultural identity (Little 2020). It is a complex and evolving process that sometimes attracts parental attention:

My younger son told me one day the supply teacher asked him if he spoke French at home because his name is a little bit French, so he said: No, I am Romanian, I am not French. That caught my attention, so he considers himself Romanian, but I don't know exactly. We don't really talk about it. They love both places. (Marina)

Most of the parents interviewed tried to travel to their home countries at least once a year. They still have family and friends in Central Eastern European countries they grew up and were educated before coming to Canada. Such transnational experiences play an important role in parenting strategies and children's language development (Duff 2015). Transnational sojourns involve both language and culture: immigrant children both practice their L1 and reinvigorate connection to their heritage culture, which shapes their plurilingual identity and belonging:

In Macedonia, it was amazing because in two days, she would start talking just Macedonian, just after two days. The knowledge is in her brain but it's hard for her to get it out. In there, because everybody's talking Macedonian, it gets easier. She starts using complete sentences without English words. (Tina)

They go to Romania, I think we go to Romanian every year almost for about a month, and that is when they get the language. (Karina)

Leo managed to send his children to a school in Czech Republic several times when they travelled there in early summer before the summer vacations. Children's plurilingual identity, which is shaped both by proficiency in several languages and the familiarity with two cultures was further reinforced when the locals could not guess they had been born in Canada rather than in Czech Republic:

Every summer they spend two months there, and a couple of times we arrived earlier so they would attend school from the beginning of June to the end of June and attend for one month the Czech school, so they were able to compare ... And nobody really realized they were born in Canada. When we are in Czech Republic, nobody realizes. (Leo)

Apart from travelling from home countries, almost all participants hosted grandparents in their Canadian homes either on a permanent or temporary basis. The presence of grandparents was mentioned as one of the main reasons for keeping L1 for their children in Canada. Prior research also showed the significant role of grandparents for the sustainability of immigrant language and culture in the host country (Nesteruk and Marks 2009).

In other words, immigrant parents are very much aware that language and culture are inseparable, which is a typical feature of plurilingualism (Galante 2020), and view the importance of keeping L1 as an important instrument of reproducing their heritage culture and ensuring intergenerational communication.

Discussion and conclusion

How is plurilingual parenting different from bilingual parenting?

In the context of the growing linguistic diversity over the last several decades (Rumbaut and Massey 2013), researchers and practitioners have started paying more attention to the parenting strategies

in families where more than one language is used (King and Fogle 2013; Piller and Gerber 2021; Slavkov 2016). Bilingual parenting is broadly conceptualised in this literature as the ‘management of more than one language in the family’ (King and Fogle 2013, 173). Although there is a growing number of recent studies that look at multilingualism in families (Curdt-Christiansen 2009), most studies of bilingual parenting focus on families where one parent speaks a minority language, while the other is a speaker of a dominant language with families adopting OPOL or L1-only policies at home (Okita 2001; Yamamoto 1995). More importantly, in the public discourse bilingual parenting is still understood through the lens of bilingualism as ‘double monolingualism’ (Heller 2007). Piller and Gerber (2021) found that many Australian parents view bilingualism as a benefit only when children are proficient in English. Proficiency in another language can even be perceived as a threat if parents believe that it would delay their children’s English language development. Subsequently, parents are invested in language separation (Palmer et al. 2014) strategies at home (OPOL, L1-only) in order to foster simultaneous bilingualism (MacLeod et al. 2013). Similarly, Seo (2021) found that Korean parents invested in bringing up their children as English-Korean bilinguals follow the ‘native speaker’ ideal and employ language separation (Palmer et al. 2014) strategies at home (e.g. English- only policy).

Despite the dominance of discourses where bilingualism is seen as ‘double monolingualism’ (Heller 2007), contemporary linguistic practices in immigrant families are becoming more complex due to the rise of superdiversity (Vertovec 2007), transnationalism (Lam and Warriner 2012), and development of digital literacy practices (Han 2021). As a result, the concept of bilingual parenting is no longer sufficient to make sense of the complexity of language practices in immigrant families and parental strategies aimed at raising plurilingual children.

Based on the findings from this study of plurilingual beliefs and reported practices among Eastern European immigrant parents in Canada and supported by latest research in the field of plurilingualism (Antony-Newman et al. 2022; Chen et al. 2022; Council of Europe 2020; Galante 2020; Lau and Van Viegen 2020; Marshall and Moore 2018; Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford, and Lawrence 2022a, 2022b), this paper develops a new concept of *plurilingual parenting*, which offers a more comprehensive understanding of language related parenting strategies in plurilingual immigrant families (Mady 2007). This new concept on the one hand gives justice to the ever-increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in immigrant families, where ‘more people from more places move to more places’ (Vertovec 2019), while simultaneously providing a better understanding of the existing linguistic and cultural diversity in such families (Gogolin 2002).

Plurilingual parenting is characterised by the following key features: (1) parental beliefs in the dynamic and fluid nature of language practices; (2) family language policies that are flexible and allow for partial proficiency in languages in familial linguistic repertoires; and (3) interconnectedness of language and culture.

- (1) ***Parental beliefs in the dynamic and fluid nature of language practices.*** The first feature of plurilingual parenting highlights the complexity of language use in immigrant families, where available linguistic resources are used in fluid and dynamic nature (CoE 2001) with different languages used differently in various contexts and across spoken, written, and digital domains (Han 2021). Immigrant parents both acknowledge such fluidity as a fact and often encourage it by adding more languages to children’s repertoires (e.g. French). While bilingual parenting is based on language separation (Palmer et al. 2014), immigrant parents in this study adopted a variety of plurilingual practices, including code-switching (Li 2011), translation (Piccardo et al. 2021), mediational (Liddicoat, 2014) and metalinguistic awareness strategies (Dressler et al. 2011) as elements of their plurilingual parenting.
- (2) ***Family language policies that are flexible and allow for partial proficiency in languages.*** The second feature of plurilingual parenting emphasises a flexible family language policy. If bilingual parenting is based on the interpretation of bilingualism as a ‘double monolingualism’ (Heller 2007) and encourages the separation of languages through such policies as OPOL or

L1-only policy (Piller and Gerber 2021), immigrant parents in this study who practice plurilingual parenting adopted a flexible family language policy. They may encourage the use of a particular language at home, but never punish children for code-switching.

- (3) ***Interconnectedness of language and culture.*** The third feature of plurilingual parenting is the engagement with the inseparability of language and culture, which is another salient feature of plurilinguism (Galante 2020). The concept of interconnectedness of language and culture does not feature prominently in the discussions about bilingual parenting. As far as migration makes people move across the borders between several cultures, this experience makes the connection between language and culture more visible for immigrant parents. Language is crucial for identity and belonging (Gérin-Lajoie 2016) and immigrant parents negotiate this issue in their homes on a regular basis.

Conclusion

This study used empirical data from one demographic group (Eastern European immigrant parents in Canada), but the new concept of plurilingual parenting allows to move beyond the constraints of bilingual parenting often underwritten by the concept of ‘double monolingualism’ (Heller 2007) and application of language separation strategies (Palmer et al. 2014). It could be used in other contexts where immigrant parents engage with rich linguistic diversity by adopting dynamic plurilingual practices, flexible family language policy, and negotiating complex linguistic and cultural identities.

In terms of implications for future research, the concept of plurilingual parenting introduced here, could be successfully employed in the area of FLP (Spolsky 2012) to better illuminate the parenting strategies in plurilingual immigrant families (Mady 2007). Plurilingual parenting could also be productively used to better understand the complex identity negotiation in immigrant families (Compton-Lilly et al. 2017). In the educational domain, teachers working with immigrant students will benefit from the familiarity with the concept of plurilingual parenting by aligning teacher expectations with parental practices and bringing students’ funds of knowledge into the classroom (Rios-Aguilar et al. 2011). Parental engagement policies that exist in multiple jurisdictions will be enriched by including the concept of plurilingual parenting as well.

Notes

1. There is a growing literature that explains differences between plurilingualism and translanguaging as theoretical frameworks (García and Otheguy 2019; Marshall and Moore 2018), but for the purposes of this article I focus on similarities between plurilingual and translanguaging practices (Vallejo and Dooly 2019) that are central to plurilingual parenting as a concept.
2. Li Wei (2018) defines translanguaging as ‘a practice that involves dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and language varieties, but more importantly a process of knowledge construction that goes beyond language(s)’ (p. 15).
3. Doye (2005) describes intercomprehension as ‘a form of communication in which each person uses his or her own language and understands that of the other’ (p. 7).
4. Code-switching is understood here as a creative and strategic use of two or more languages by a language user in a particular communicative situation (Wei, 2011)
5. Plurilingual repertoire is a key concept for plurilingualism as a theoretical framework, plurilingual pedagogy, and plurilingual parenting advocated here. Chen and Hélot (2018) define plurilingual repertoire as the ‘totality of linguistic, sociolinguistic, metalinguistic and (socio)cultural knowledge related to a number of languages (and their varieties and registers), mastered at different degrees and for different use, that is available to an individual in an (exolingualistic) communicative and interactive situation’ (p. 170).

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